(8.)

Political Dialogues.

Number I.

ON THE GENERAL

PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT.

LONDON,
PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD.

MDCCXCI.

[*Price Three-pence.*]

Political Dialogues.

A. TWENTY-TWO years ago, you and I had a converſation on *the State of Liberty in Great Britain and the Colonies**. At that time you were not a little alarmed at ſeveral recent encroachments of the power of the crown, and eſpecially at the meaſures which were then taking with our American colonies. The ſenſe of the nation, expreſſed in remonſtrances, and other ways, contributed not a little to put a ſtop to the particular encroachments then complained of on liberty at home; but thoſe on the liberties of America proceeded till they produced an open rupture with our colonies, and ended in their entire ſeparation from us. This is an event which, though we then dreaded, we now (excepting the bloodſhed and expence attending it) rejoice in, as having proved happy for both countries; having effectually ſecured the liberties of America, and bearing a favourable aſpect upon our own. Since that time other great events of a public nature have taken place, and the minds of all thinking men, in this country and throughout all Europe, are big with expectation of others of the ſame nature, ſtill more

* This refers to a ſmall tract with this title, publiſhed in 1769.

extenſive. I cannot help, therefore, wiſhing to have ſome converſation with you on the ſubject.

B. The great events to which you allude have not failed to excite my attention, as well as that of thouſands of others, ſince they are likely to have the moſt important and extenſive conſequences. In America and France (to ſay nothing of Poland) we have examples of two intirely new conſtitutions of government, that deſerve particular notice, as differing from any that the world has ſeen before; and I own that my reflections upon them have given me new lights on the ſubject of government, and ſuch as I am very willing to lay before you, that we may conſider the particulars diſpaſſionately, and at leiſure.

A. The two moſt ſtriking features in the new government of France, are the abolition of all *titles of nobility*, and the aſſumption of the whole power of the ſtate by the *National Aſſembly*, without allowing an effectual negative to any other body of men, or to the King; whereas we in this conutry are ſo uſed to the idea of the balance of *three powers*, that we are apt to think no other ſyſtem can be ſo good.

B. This is a very general opinion, and was my own. But perhaps we have not ſufficiently conſidered either the late ſituation of France, the origin and uſe of nobility, or the proper nature and uſe of checks upon public reſolutions.

The affairs of France were evidently come to a great criſis, in conſequence of their enormous public debts, and the exceſſive power of the

the crown, which are in a great meaſure *cauſe* and *effect* to each other. The king, the nobility, and the clergy, were evidently all intereſted in perpetuating the abuſes; and conſequently to have allowed an abſolute negative to any one of them would have defeated every project of effectual reform. It was therefore wiſe in the leaders of the people, who are *the many*, to remove this certain obſtruction from *the few*, to meaſures calculated for the general advantage. Without this previous ſtep, nothing of conſequence could have been done.

A. It always appeared to me that France was the laſt country in Europe in which we could expect any ſuch revolution as hath lately taken place in it; the court having been long in poſſeſſion of all the power of the nation, and the great body of the people having no voice at all in any public meaſures.

B. In general, it is only on ſuch great emergenices as theſe that the ſenſe and power of the people can make themſelves felt; and even this great occaſion would have paſſed over without any ſuch happy conſequence, if the minds of the people had not been previouſly enlightened on the ſubject of government, ſo that they could go at once to the proper ſource of their abuſes. Without this, the late embarraſſment in the finances of France would only have terminated in a national bankruptcy, and would not have produced any change in the form of its government.

Notwithſtanding the great force of every nation conſiſts in the maſs of the common people

who cannot receive any material favours from the executive powers of the ſtate; and therefore cannot be much influenced by them, yet they are in general ſo wholly occupied in their own affairs, that they are incapable of attending to any thing elſe, and therefore nothing but extreme oppreſſion will rouſe them to action; and when they are rouſed their proceedings are generally irregular and ineffectual, both from their not knowing the true ſources of their grievances, and from their inability to act in concert. Well knowing this their ſituation, when they have no perſon in whom they can put intire confidence, they often bear the extreme of oppreſſion without looking to any remedy at all, while their governors enjoy all the valuable effects of their induſtry. In this country, where we do not complain of oppreſſion, becauſe it is partial, an enormous proportion, it is thought two-thirds, of the fruit of its induſtry is at the abſolute diſpoſal of government, and this was very much the caſe with France.

A. This being a moſt unnatural ſtate of ſociety, its expenditure bearing a moſt unreaſonable proportion to its reſources, it is certainly of importance to inquire into the cauſes of it, in order to diſcover in what manner ſo great an evil may be guarded againſt in a new government, or remedied in an old one.

B. Since this profuſion of the public money aroſe from other perſons than thoſe whoſe induſtry acquired it having the diſpoſal of it, it would certainly have been prevented if this latter

claſs

claſs of citizens, viz. the induſtrious, by whoſe labour the wealth was procured, either had the management of bublic buſineſs, or a ſufficient controul over thoſe who do conduct it; and it ſeems impoſſible in the nature of things that there ſhould be any other remedy. So long as one ſet of men provide the money, and another ſet have the diſpoſal of it, there will be no œconomy. The great difficulty, however, is how to bring this about, or how to conſtruct a government ſo that the labouring and induſtrious part of the community ſhall have an effectual check upon their *governors*, or, to call things by their proper names, their *ſervants*. And ſince we muſt, in all theſe caſes, conſider mankind as governed by intereſt, the government muſt be conſtructed in ſuch a manner, as that no perſon ſhall be intereſted to bring things into this ſtate, or that if they be, it ſhall not be in their power to do it.

A. Such a conſtruction of a government will, I fear, be very difficult.

B. As great things are beſt underſtood by compariſon with ſmall ones of the ſame nature, let us conſider by what means it is that the intereſt of a pariſh, or ſingle townſhip, is beſt conſulted. How is it that no more money is raiſed than is really wanted for any public purpoſe, and how is any miſmanagement in the expenditure prevented?

1. In the firſt place care is taken that whenever money is to be raiſed, the occaſion of

the demand is explained to thoſe who are to advance it, ſo that, if they will give any attention to the ſubject, they may clearly underſtand it.

2. A majority at leaſt of thoſe who are to advance the money have a power of granting or withholding it at pleaſure, and when any unforeſeen abuſe takes place, they can immediately interpoſe, and check it.

3. They themſelves either appoint the officers who ſuperintend the collection and expenditure of the public money, and pay them for their trouble, or they diſcharge thoſe offices in their turns, ſo that they all alike ſhare the expence and the burden.

4. If any perſon be indemnified for his trouble by a *ſalary*, it is always proportioned to the time and the labour which he gives to the public, and it is no greater than is ſufficient to get the buſineſs well done, ſo that competition for offices can never be great. If this be the caſe, it is a proof that the ſalary is exorbitant, and ought to be retrenched.

5. No office is held a longer time than the occaſion requires, and the greater is the *power* that it gives a man, the ſhorter is the *time* that he is allowed to hold it; and only offices of mere labour or ſmall ſalary, for which there is little competition, are continued long in the ſame hands.

6. Upon no conſideration is it ever in the power of any perſons to check the proceedings which

which are determined upon by a majority; ſo that in one diſtrict, or townſhip, there is ultimately but *one will.* Otherwiſe all public buſineſs might be at a ſtand.

A. If theſe plain maxims be obſerved, it ſeems, indeed, impoſſible that the affairs of any pariſh, or townſhip, ſhould be ill conducted, and eſpecially that the public money ſhould be laviſhed. But how can theſe maxims of government, be extended to a large kingdom?

B. By the method of *repreſentation* every difficulty ariſing from the extent of territory and the number of people, united under any government, is eaſily obviated.

Though the individuals who compoſe a whole nation cannot meet, and do their own buſineſs, as in a ſingle pariſh, or townſhip; and but few of them will have leiſure to attend to the intereſt of the whole, any perſon can make choice of another to act for him: and if his choice be limited to perſons living in his neighbourhood, he cannot be much miſtaken in their general character, either for ability or integrity. Let one of theſe delegates, therefore, be choſen for every diſtrict containing ten or twenty thouſand inhabitants. Theſe, having a more extenſive knowledge of the country, will be able to ſelect the fitteſt perſons to act for them in a much larger diſtrict; and in this manner, be the country ever ſo extenſive, a proper number, ſuppoſe a thouſand perſons, the fitteſt to conduct public buſineſs of all kinds, may be ſelected, and conſtitute

a *national aſſembly*, ſimilar to that of France at preſent.

Such a national aſſembly as this might be choſen even annually, if it was thought proper, without much inconvenience or expence, none at all to the candidates, and very little to the community, provided the original diſtricts were ſmall. In this caſe the votes of the largeſt country might be collected without any tumult, in a ſingle day. A national aſſembly thus choſen would conſiſt of the moſt reſpectable members of the ſociety: and as they would not derive any pecuniary advantage from ſerving their country, their proceedings might be conducted without tumult, eſpecially if all votes were given by ballot.

It is needleſs to ſay that a national aſſembly thus conſtituted, and frequently changed, could not have any other object in their conſultations than the intereſt of the whole community; and though the country ſhould contain within itſelf a thouſand different intereſts, and every member of the aſſembly ſhould have a view to ſome ſeparate intereſt, they would of courſe ſo balance one another, that the reſult would be a meaſure favouring *the greater number*, which ought to be the object of every government. If any of their meaſures ſhould eventually prove to be injurious, it would ſoon be rectified. In ſuch a ſtate even experiments might be made with ſafety, becauſe it would not be the intereſt of the majority to aggravate, or perpetuate, any abuſe.

A. What

A. What do you take to be the chief ſources of abuſe in all governments?

B. The great ſources of abuſe in all ſtates have been the exceſſive emoluments of office, and the continuance of them in the ſame perſons or families. This neceſſarily gives them an intereſt ſeparate from that of the ſociety at large, and an intereſt in increaſing abuſes in their own favour. But when the ſalaries of office are ſmall, or nothing, (and in all caſes the more *honourable* they are, the leſs occaſion there is to make them *lucrative*) and when they are held only for a ſhort term, there can be no temptation whatever to create, or increaſe, an abuſe. For every man will then govern as he would wiſh to be governed, when it comes to be his turn, as, in a government ſo conſtructed, it ſoon muſt be.

This rule will operate to the extinction of all *hereditary privileges*; as they neceſſarily give thoſe who are in poſſeſſion of them a ſeparate intereſt, which they will be ſtudious to augment. Beſides, all privileges peculiar to a few neceſſarily imply a degradation of the reſt of the community, and it is evidently the intereſt of the whole that all privileges ſhould be open to virtue and ability, directed to the public good. But if ſtations of honour and advantage be already pre-occupied, the door is ſhut againſt all new claimants.

A. There is ſomething very faſcinating in the idea of hereditary honours, and powers, though I am well aware that a country may ſuffer by them.

B. One evident conſequence of all hereditary honours, like thoſe of ſovereign princes, is the great expence at which it is thought neceſſary they ſhould be maintained, which occaſions a needleſs and pernicious profuſion of public money; as if the honour of a nation was concerned in *this*, rather than in the conſtruction of public works, of ſubſtantial uſe to poſterity. But the greateſt danger ariſes from hereditary power of all kinds almoſt neceſſarily increaſing, eſpecially if it fall into the hands of a ſucceſſion of able men; and even if princes be themſelves weak, it is the intereſt of abler men to augment their power, in order that they may avail themſelves of it.

A. But we generally give a decided preference to *hereditary* before *elective* monarchy.

B. The only danger that can ariſe to a ſtate from making any ſtation of honour, or power, *elective*, has ariſen from the greatneſs of the power, and its long duration, being at leaſt for life. Make the prize leſs worth contending for, and there will be fewer competitors, and leſs inconvenience from the competition.

The only recommendation of hereditary ſucceſſion to *kingly* power is the greatneſs of it, in conſequence of which it is of importance that the right to its poſſeſſion ſhould be univerſally acknowledged; competition for ſuch power as *this* being the occaſion of civil wars, the greateſt evil that can befal a country.

That hereditary honours and powers are not *neceſſary* to government, is evident from the hiſtory

hiſtory of Eaſtern nations, in which, the reigning family only excepted, they are unknown; and if by the mode of repreſentation the prince himſelf could be appointed by the people, as all other officers are appointed by him, the ſyſtem would, in this reſpect, be uniform and complete.

A. But when perſons continue in office only a ſhort time, they retire when they have acquired experience proper to conduct themſelves in them. Is it not therefore better to have magiſtrates for life?

B. When the chief magiſtrate holds his office for life, as in this country, the buſineſs of it is not really done by *him*, but by his miniſters, who are frequently changed. And would it not be better to have a regular proviſion for changing them, than that it ſhould be done at the caprice of any individual, whoſe choice of miniſters may not be directed by any view to the public good.

Beſides, the buſineſs of ſtates is not ſo difficult, but that perſons who give proper attention to it may eaſily prepare themſelves for the conduct of it. We change our houſe of commons every ſeven years (and ought to do it in much leſs time) without any inconvenience at all. The ſtates of North America have ſeen no reaſon to apprehend any thing from changing their aſſemblies every year, their ſenate every two years, and their chief magiſtrate himſelf every four years. The Romans, while their affairs were in the moſt flouriſhing ſtate, changed both their conſuls

at

at home, and their commanders abroad every year; and their ſenate alſo, might have been changed with as little inconvenience. Hereditary honours in Europe are no older than the feudal ſyſtem; the titles of nobility being original names of offices, which together with eſtates in land deſcended to the heir.

A. If hereditary honours and offices aroſe from the feudal ſyſtem, it may well be expected that they will be endangered, from the ſame cauſes which have been fatal to other parts of the ſame ſyſtem.

B. The rights both of hereditary monarchs, and of an hereditary nobility, which grew up with the feudal ſyſtem, muſt finally fall with other parts of the ſame ſyſtem, before that prevailing ſpirit of *induſtry* and *commerce*, to which it was ever hoſtile, and before that diffuſion of *knowledge* on the ſubject of government, as well as on every other ſubject of human enquiry, which has burſt out in the laſt half century. This knowledge has gradually undermined that *opinion*, on which all hereditary privileges were built. Every thing in ſociety will now be brought to the plain teſt of *uſe* and *expedience*; and if excluſive privileges of any kind appear to be of no uſe but to the poſſeſſors of them; and if theſe poſſeſſors, who of courſe are *few*, be gainers in exact proportion to the loſs and degradation of the reſt of the community, who are *the many*, theſe many (who will ſoon find that they have the power, and that thoſe diſtinctions ſo degrading to themſelves depend

depend upon their pleaſure) will level them all, and it will ſoon be found that the whole community, and even thoſe who ſeem to be the greateſt loſers, will in reality be gainers by the change.

A. Will not the nobility be great ſufferers from the loſs of their privileges?

B. If we conſider the education of men of rank, and the fate that almoſt certainly awaits them, from their excluſion from thoſe employments (thoſe ſpheres of virtuous activity) which are open to other men, and the conſequent debaſement of their characters, with the deprivation of almoſt all real enjoyment, and even the utter extinction to which all great families rapidly tend, no wiſe man would wiſh to make his poſterity noble, however ambitious he might be to acquire honours for himſelf.

Men of rank and great fortune, and eſpecially princes, are almoſt neceſſarily ill educated, I mean in its moſt important ſenſe, as it reſpects *the mind.* The very apparatus for their careful inſtruction tends to defeat the purpoſe of it. It cannot be concealed from them, that ſeveral perſons, ſelected for their ability and worth, are devoted to their uſe; and the impreſſion which this conſideration alone will make on their minds can hardly fail to do them more harm than all the inſtructions they receive will do them good; even admitting what will ſeldom be the caſe, that the tutor ſhould aſſume the proper authority of his character, and forget that he may hereafter receive

receive favours from his pupil, and not conſult his amuſement more than his inſtruction.

To find a ſphere of vigorous exertion which ſhall intereſt a man ſufficiently to make him happy in his purſuits, is barely poſſible in the caſe of mere independent *fortune*, even without hereditary *honours*. Young men poſſeſſed of the means of indulgence, will ſeldom attend to any thing elſe; and without far better principles, and better diſpoſitions, than men of fortune are likely to acquire, we well know of what *kind* that indulgence will be, and how little it will add to their own happineſs, or that of others. The man who makes a ſenſible uſe of riches which he has not acquired, muſt be ſomething almoſt above humanity; and therefore it is not to be expected in the ordinary courſe of things; and when hereditary titles, and other diſtinctions, are added to hereditary wealth, the danger muſt be greatly increaſed.

There is no man, even though his mind ſhould have acquired ſtrength by perſonal exertion, who is not more or leſs hurt by the conſtant adulation and ſervility of thoſe who are about him. We ſee this in the caſe of ſuch a man as the late Dr. S. Johnſon, who roſe into public notice by his genius, and by exertions which muſt at times have been laborious and irkſome; and yet the flattery that he met with made him extremely conceited and inſolent, ſo that, had it not been checked by his miſerable ſuperſtition, and a conſtant fear of death, he would have been as unapproachable

unapproachable as an eaſtern monarch. Alſo, the court that was paid to him on account of ſuch attainments in knowledge as he had made, led him to neglect and deſpiſe others of infinitely more value; ſo that though he might be called a giant in the Belles Lettres, he was hardly a child in philoſophy, morals, theology, or the theory of government; that is, though he was great in little things, he was contemptibly little in great ones. His great powers were exhauſted on the ſubjects of language and taſte; and his acquaintance with human nature, which appears to ſo much advantage in his Rambler, was not greater than that of many other perſons, though his wonderful power of language makes it ſeem to be ſo.

If diſtinction and applauſe could have ſo unfavourable an effect on a mind like that of Dr. Johnſon, whoſe natural powers were probably equal to thoſe of almoſt any man whatever; if the ſituation to which his genius and exertions advanced him could ſo effectually put a ſtop to all farther improvement, what can we expect of men who find themſelves in the poſſeſſion of all they can wiſh as ſoon as they come of age? What motive can they have to exert themſelves at all? The world of *action* they conceive to be ſhut to them, while that of *enjoyment*, which to them is infinitely more attractive, is open. Can we expect in them the temper of Hercules? Will they prefer the arduous ſteeps of virtue, to the ſoft vale of pleaſure? We find that they do not.

not. And too often their minds, and bodies alſo, are utterly ruined before they diſcover their miſtake.

Every hiſtory in the world ſhows the degradation of royal families, from thoſe of Aſſyria and China, to thoſe of Europe, and noble families neceſſarily ſuffer from the ſame cauſe. The only difference in their favour is that they find more equals than kings can do. But never will men appear to proper advantage, never will they be in a ſituation in which they will have ſufficient motives to exert themſelves, in order to acquire uſeful and laudable qualities, and in which all improper propenſities will be repreſſed, but in a ſtate of perfect equality; when every advantage will be acceſſible to every man alike, and where no man can expect any preference except from ſuperior virtue or ſuperior ability, employed for the public good.

Such ſentiments as theſe are evidently now prevailing in Europe, and the late revolutions in America and France, together with that in Poland, cannot fail greatly to accelerate their growth. If the affairs of theſe countries go on well a few years longer, and of this but little doubt can be entertained, the extinction of all hereditary nobility, if not of hereditary monarchy, cannot be far diſtant. Nay, if hereditary diſtinctions be not voluntarily abandoned, they will come to be conſidered as even reproachful. In France an *ariſtocrate* is already a term of contempt.

A. But

A. But the greateſt objection to the new conſtitution of France is not ſo much from the abolition of all hereditary titles and privileges, as from the whole buſineſs of the ſtate being done in one aſſembly.

B. The only good reaſon for giving negatives to different bodies of men has been from the danger of *haſty reſolutions*, and ſuch as favour particular claſſes of perſons only. But to make this government by checks complete, the people ſhould be divided into as many claſſes as they really conſiſt of, viz. huſbandmen, manufacturers, traders, lawyers, phyſicians, clergy, &c. and each different intereſt ſhould have its negative on the proceedings of the reſt: but the abſurdity of this ſyſtem is too obvious to be argued. On the contrary, it is certainly true political wiſdom to make as few diſtinctions as poſſible, and to blend every intereſt, by admitting all perſons promiſcuouſly into the ſeat of government: becauſe they will then have exactly that degree of influence which their importance to the ſtate requires, and will therefore have it in their power to check any reſolution affecting themſelves in particular, as much as it ought to be checked, and no more. And in order to prevent any *haſty reſolutions*, times may be fixed for reconſidering every meaſure, and opportunity given for hearing every thing that can be urged againſt them, which is all that can be wanted in order to take the beſt.

There does not, therefore, ſeem to be any neceſſity for different powers in the ſame ſtate, each

each having an abſolute negative on the proceedings of the other, in order to ſecure the moſt deliberate diſcuſſion of every public meaſure. If the majority of any people underſtand their own intereſt, there can be no good reaſon why they ſhould not have the power of promoting it, and that with as little obſtruction and delay as poſſible. If the obſtruction and delay ariſe from orders of men who have intereſts oppoſite to that of the majority of the people, ſuch orders ought not to exiſt, but ſhould be exterminated as a nuiſance, neceſſarily operating to the diminution of public happineſs.

In every ſtate, as in every ſingle perſon, there ought to be but *one will*, and no important buſineſs ſhould be prevented from proceeding by any oppoſite will. If there be *two wills*, and they can effectualy counteract each other, it is no longer *one ſtate*, and one government, but *two ſtates*, and two governments, which though they may agree to act in concert, may likewiſe act ſeparately, and ſuch was in fact the origin of our mixed government by the king, the barons, the clergy, and the commons, each having had originally oppoſite intereſts, and at length agreeing to form a ſyſtem by which they ſhould mutually check each other.

If negatives in government be uſeful at all, they ſhould not be given to different claſſes of men, who have their ſeparate intereſts, but to perſons *differently enlightened*, ſo that the more intelligent may be a check upon thoſe who have little beſides their property to recommend them.

them. If for inſtance, a houſe of aſſembly be choſen conſiſting of a thouſands perſons, it may be uſeful to have another body, conſiſting of an hundred, whoſe reputation for ſuperior wiſdom ſhall recommend them as a check upon the proceedings of the larger body; and from the whole community ſome one perſon may be pitched upon as qualified to be a check upon both thoſe houſes. But if there is to be one will in one ſtate, theſe negatives ſhould only opperate for a limited time, like that of the king of France, or the king of Poland, and of the preſident of the States of North America.

In this reſpect there is more wiſdom in the new conſtitution of Poland than in that of North America. In the former the ſupreme power reſides in the diet, but in the latter the ſenate has an abſolute negative on all the reſolutions of the houſe of repreſentatives.

Still leſs wiſdom is there in appointing theſe extraordinary powers to deſcend to poſterity, becauſe ſuperior wiſdom does not ſo deſcend. Let the individuals be choſen, and let their power be continued as long as ſhall be thought expedient; but let their deſcendants have no advantage but from their own perſonal merit.

If the intereſt of the whole ſociety as conſiſting of a number of individuals, all equal with reſpect to their natural rights, be the true end of government, which is now acknowledged by all writers on the ſubject, it is obvious that no particular claſs or body of men within the ſtate ſhould have an abſolute negative on the proceed-

ings

ings of all the reſt; becauſe it may happen that the thing which moſt of all requires reformation may reſpect that very body itſelf. It may even be better for the whole that no ſuch body, with ſuch a negative, ſhould exiſt. To this, however, it could not be expected that that body ſhould give its conſent.

In France the clergy made one of the three ſtates of the kingdom, ſo that whenever they met nothing of conſequence could be done without their concurrence. But it is not ſo with us, and we prefer our own ſyſtem. Now, ſhould the people in France, from comparing their conſtitution with ours, have come to think as we do, how could they poſſibly have adopted that part of our conſtitution whilſt the clergy retained their negative.

It is poſſible alſo that the people of any country heretofore governed by kings may come to think that it would be better for them not to be ſo governed, but that their chief magiſtrate ſhould officiate for a term of years only, like the preſident of the United States of America. This, however, would be impoſſible ſo long as their king retained his conſtitutional negative on the propoſal. They muſt either therefore go on in a way which they think diſadvantageous to them, or dethrone their prince by violence.

A. But does not our country derive ſubſtantial benefit from the balance of three powers in the ſtate, the king, the lords, and the houſe of commons?

B. In

B. In countries in which different orders of men are poſſeſſed of a negative on all proceedings, it is often more nominal than real. If our houſe of commons were a true repreſentative of the people, the negative of the houſe of lords, added to that of the king, would be of no avail in counteracting any proceedings of importance; and this country would be a real republic. According to our forms, the houſe of commons repreſents the great maſs of the landed and the monied intereſts of this country, whilſt the lords are a ſet of perſons whoſe *honours* only, and not their *eſtates*, neceſſarily deſcend to their poſterity; and the king is a perſon whoſe very ſubſiſtence depends upon the people, and who, as the hiſtory of the country ſhews, is liable to be ſet aſide for miſgovernment.

In this ſtate of things, let us ſuppoſe every degree of undue and ſuperſtitious reverence to kings and peers to be out of the queſtion, ſo that no idea of *ſacredneſs* ſhall be attached to their perſons, but that they ſhall be eſteemed only in proportion to the opinion which the people ſhall have of their virtue, ability, and the uſe of their office to the public, and that a meaſure which both the repreſentatives of the people, and the peers alſo, ſhall deem to be of the greateſt importance to the public welfare is depending. If the king alone were to withhold his aſſent, the miniſter who adviſed him to it would be impeached; and if the king did not change his miniſter, and his conduct too, he would

would be virtually dethroned, though, according to the conſtitution, this is impoſſible. The whole nation would never ſuffer the opinion of a ſingle man, which they would of courſe deem to be obſtinacy, or inſanity, to obſtruct their favourite meaſures. Accordingly, our princes never proceed in this way.

Let us, again, ſuppoſe that both the king and the lords refuſe to give their aſſent to any meaſure which the real repreſentatives of the people ſhould deem to be of the greateſt importance to them, and that no remonſtrance ſhould avail to gain their concurrence. Would not the commons, ſeconded by the whole body of the people, do what they actually did in the time of Charles I. i. e. after oppoſing the king under fictitious pretences, vote both his office, and a houſe of peers, to be uſeleſs? And what power could prevent their reſolution from taking effect? In all caſes it is the will of the powerful that muſt rule, and the permiſſion of any negative by that power is nothing more, in fact, than a condeſcenſion to hear another opinion, which will be either acceeded to, or rejected, at pleaſure; and in the nature of things it cannot be otherwiſe.

A. You were ſaying that our hereditary nobility had their origin in the feudal ſyſtem. I wiſh you would give me a more particular account of it, and of the power they now have as a ſeparate and independent branch of the legiſlature.

B. In

B. In ancient times ſucceſſion to *power* aroſe from the ſame principles with that of ſucceſſion to an *eſtate*, and this was very gradual among our anceſtors in the free ſtates of Germany. Though their chiefs were originally choſen from among their *peers*, or equals, on a particular emergency only, ſuch as commanding in a war; and when the war was over they ceaſed to be conſidered in that light; yet when conqueſts were made, and it was neceſſary to keep up the form and diſcipline of an army in the conquered country, the office of chief became permanent. In this ſtate of things it was alſo found inconvenient to make the former annual diviſion of lands, and therefore the chief, in whoſe diſpoſal the land was, allowed every man to retain his poſſeſſion for life, on condition of military ſervice.

After the death of any poſſeſſor, if the next heir was capable of cultivating and defending the eſtate, it was natural to give him the preference; and by this means the idea of *hereditary right* to land aroſe, and got eſtabliſhed. In like manner if the chief magiſtrate left a ſon qualified to ſucceed him, he was ſuffered ſo to do, and at length the idea of an hereditary right to *power* came to be as fixed as that of hereditary right to *property*. At length it was allowed even in the caſe of minors, guardians being appointed to act for them till they came of age, and were capable of acting for themſelves. Thus, in a courſe of time, the idea of an hereditary right to

power

power came to be as fixed in European countries, where it had been unknown for ages, as it is in the Eaſt, where it has been from time immemorial; and the idea of the ſubſerviency of this power to the public good was intirely loſt.

The fact alſo was that our kings, from being ſubject to be controuled by the great barons, or landholders, came to have the ſole power of government in their own hands; and the regular meetings of the great council of the nation had not, in reality, any other object than to expreſs the homage of the ſeveral members of it, and to *give advice to the crown* when it was aſked. In the whole hiſtory of the Norman princes till the reign of king John, during which the feudal ſyſtem was complete, we perceive no traces of any thing but abſolute power in the prince. Whatever forms there might be of a government originally free, they had no effect. The King did whatever he pleaſed. He could not indeed levy any tax, all *ſubſidies* being voluntary gifts to the crown; but then, by the feudal ſyſtem, while the crown lands and revenues were entire, he had little occaſion for ſubſidies; the ſervices of his vaſſals enabling him, in general, even to carry on any war in which he choſe to engage.

A. How came the lords to be poſſeſſed of the negative which they now have on all public reſolutions?

B. When the feudal ſervices became exorbitant, the Barons, who were then the only great land holders, oppoſed the king, and combining

bining together they became a real check upon him, ſo that without their concurrence he could not do what he had done before. The clergy alſo, in connexion with the court of Rome, was another power in the ſtate, the concurrence of which was requiſite for any important meaſure.

A. That the barons, being the great land-holders, ſhould be able to controul the king; and that their concurrence ſhould become neceſſary to all the meaſures of government, is not to be wondered at. But how came the common people, who were originally the mere vaſſals of the crown, or of the nobles, to get the power of which they are now poſſeſſed?

B. The common people were of no account till by their induſtry they acquired property, and the nobles by their extravagance became needy. It then became as convenient for the one to ſell their lands as for the others to buy them; and the king, wanting the aid of the people againſt the nobles, favoured this transfer of property, and conſequently of power. After this, the people adding to their induſtry, and the nobles to their extravagance, the greateſt part of the landed property of the kingdom came into the hands of the commons; and at this day it would perhaps have been wholly ſo, if gentlemen of great landed property were not continually made peers. Indeed, a few generations will generally ſee both the property, and the families, of the rich and luxurious become in a manner extinct. If the preſent king only had made no peers, thoſe

who would have remained of the old ſtock would have been inconſiderable; ſo that their negative in the affairs of government would not have been of any account.

By this means the mere vaſſals of the king and of the barons came to be of great conſequence, and formed a diſtinct power in the ſtate; ſo that the houſe of commons, conſiſting of the repreſentatives of borough towns, and of the leſſer or impoveriſhed nobility, who found it convenient to rank with them, came to have a negative upon all proceedings, and even the ſole power of levying taxes; while the clergy, after the Reformation, loſt their conſequence, and became a mere acceſſion to the power of the crown.

A. Since the king, lords and commons have each a negative on all public proceedings, whence have ariſen the complaints of the great power of the crown, which, in a famous reſolution of the houſe of commons was declared "to have in-"creaſed, to be increaſing, and to require to be "diminiſhed."

B. The real foundation of the power of the crown, as alſo of that of the lords, in this country, is well known to be very different from what a ſtranger, who ſhould only have read a deſcription of the form of our government, would take it to be. All the real power of the ſtate is in fact in the commons, who repreſent the greateſt maſs of property in the country, and the greater part of the power of the king, and of the lords too, ariſes from the influence they have in the lower houſe.

houſe. How this influence is obtained and ſecured is no ſecret. Beſides the immenſe power of the crown in the diſpoſal of lucrative places and penſions, a great proportion of the members are in fact nominated by the crown. By this means it is well known that, in ordinary caſes, the king's miniſters are abſolutely ſure of their majority in the houſe of commons, even though they ſhould give no reaſon whatever for their meaſures, which however, it is generally thought expedient for them to do. Though, therefore, the king has nominally, and by the conſtitution, that power of making peace and war, which was derived from the feudal times, the court never ventures upon any meaſure of ſo much importance without being well aſſured beforehand of ſufficient ſupport from the commons.

If, in ordinary caſes, the power of the king be abſolute in the houſe of commons, it is ſtill more ſo in that of the lords, moſt of whom are not only obliged to the crown for the high rank which they hold in the ſtate, but are kept dependant by the proviſion they wiſh to make for their children and friends, independently of trade or of a profeſſion; and for this they have no where to look but to the court. Beſides, the Scotch peers, and the biſhops, being in fact nominated by the court, are ſure to favour its views.

A. If this be the caſe, I ſee no poſſible means of obtaining a redreſs of public grievances.

B. What is here obſerved reſpects the ordinary meaſures of government, from which no

imminent danger to the ſtate is apprehended. In this caſe there can be no doubt but that a greater conſideration would overpower a leſs. If a foreign invaſion, or a national bankruptcy (either of which would put an end to the power of the crown, and of courſe cut off all expectations from it) was ſeriouſly apprehended, the members of the houſe of commons, and the lords too, being no longer influenced by the crown, would vote according to their real opinion, becauſe their own intereſt and that of the country at large would then be the ſame. But while any ſet of men can expect to derive benefit to themſelves at the expence of the whole community, it muſt be ſuppoſed that, in general, they will not ſcruple to do it. Their very judgments may be ſo far blinded by their intereſts, as to imagine that the good of the whole is beſt promoted by this corruption and abuſe.

A. If a majority of the houſe of commons be thus in the intereſt of the court, where are we to look for a check upon it?

B. A great check upon the meaſures of the court, and on the ſervility of the houſe of commons, is the declared *ſenſe of the people* at large; and were they truly enlightened, and ſhowed a proper ſpirit, their opinion only concerning public meaſures, though they are no nominal part of the legiſlature, would be deciſive. Becauſe the real power of the ſtate is in their hands. Their greateſt difficulty in the exerciſe of this power ariſes from their want of union.

But

But even this might be remedied by committees of correſpondence, and other means, ſo as ſufficiently to overawe the governing powers. And though ſo many even of the common people are directly or indirectly influenced by the court, that very little is to be expected from this quarter in the preſent ſtate of things, it is highly proper that their minds ſhould be enlightened, and that they ſhould have a full ſenſe of their natural rights, in order that they may be prepared to act with intelligence and effect in any new ſtate of things that may occur.

A. Does it not become all true patriots not only to endeavour to enlighten the minds of their countrymen, in order that they may be ready to take advantage of new ſituations, but alſo to endeavour to bring things into thoſe ſituations, ſo favourable to their exertions?

B. No wiſe man will ever wiſh for any great or ſudden change in any exiſting form of government, eſpecially if it have been of long continuance, and the people in general be tolerably eaſy and happy under it, becauſe ſuch changes are very hazardous, unleſs the minds of the people be fully prepared for them by much previous diſcuſſion and reaſoning on the ſubject. But when the minds of the generality of the people are well informed concerning the nature of government, and the true ſource of all abuſes, their only expreſſing their ſenſe of them may be the means of procuring a redreſs of their complaints without any violence whatever; or if

a criſis ſhould ariſe in which great changed muſt neceſſarily be made, they will be prepares to make a wiſe and effectual reform in their government. But without this no uſeful change can be made.

If in any country the minds of men were prepoſſeſſed, as they generally are in the Eaſt, with the idea of the ſacredneſs of kingly or prieſtly power, ſo that they ſhould not think themſelves at liberty to diminiſh it, though any one king ſhould be dethroned, or put to death, for his abuſe of power, they would have no other idea of relieving themſelves than by putting another, of whom they had better hopes, in his place. In ſuch countries all revolutions terminate without any change in the form of government, which conſequently remain as liable to abuſe as ever. The reaſon is, that the minds of the people were not enlightened with reſpect to the nature and object of government. They conſidered ſome perſons as born to command, and others to obey, and had no idea of the naturally equal rights of every member in the community, and that the only end of government, or public order, is the happineſs of the whole.

In like manner, if the minds of men were prepoſſeſſed with the idea of the neceſſity of ſome *religious eſtabliſhment*, the abuſes of one would only lead to the ſubſtitution of another; and ſpiritual tyranny, whatever the country might ſuffer by it, would be tranſmitted from one generation to another.

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In reality, it is *opinion* that governs the world, and till the general opinion in any country concerning the foundation, the nature, and the uſes of government be changed, all uſeful revolutions will be impoſſible, or not permanent. While the Turks, for example, retain the idea of a right in the houſe Othman to govern them, they will never bear a prince of any other family, or any other form of government than that of an abſolute monarchy, limited, however, as their government is, and in fact all arbitrary governments are. They would conſider any other prince, how ſucceſsful ſoever againſt the reigning family, as nothing more than an uſurper, and every other form of government as unlawful for *them*; and though they might yield to neceſſity, and think proper to conceal their ſentiments for a time; yet if they were not fundamentally changed, they would only gain ſtrength by ſuppreſſion. They would be the more thought of, and cheriſhed, on this very account; and on ſome occaſion or other, which would be ſure to occur, they would operate with redoubled violence in favour of the antient family, and the antient form of government.

This appears in the hiſtory of England. While the idea of hereditary right in any family to the crown was not forgotten, an injury done to the ſuppoſed *lawful heir*, by his temporary excluſion from the throne, almoſt enſured his future ſucceſſion. There never appeared ſo enthuſiaſtic an attachment to the family of Stuart as

as at the reſtoration of Charles II. and the bul
of the nation were Jacobites till long after th
acceſſion of the houſe of Hanover; ſo that
required great prudence, as well as great vigou
in the reigning family to exclude the Pretende
Were there a reputable heir to that family
even now, and he ſhould become a proteſtan
it would, no doubt, give ſerious alarm to th
family on the throne.

If the minds of the great body of the Frenc
nation did not appear to be thoroughly enlight
ened on the ſubject of government; had no
their former enthuſiaſtic attachment to thei
monarchs, and the rights of the monarchy, re
ceived a fatal blow by the late writings in fa
vour of liberty, by the ſhocking abuſes of thei
government, by the embaraſſments that by thi
means they were brought into, and by the exampl
of America, there could be no dependence at al
on their late revolution. The king might ſleep
or do what he pleaſed, his *rights*, as they migh
be called, would not long lie dormant, and there
would ſoon be a *counter-revolution*, when the
chains of ſlavery would be rivetted faſter than
ever. But while the people in general approve
of the preſent government, all attempts to over-
turn it will be in vain.

A. I perceive that you are far from being
diſcouraged by the preſent aſpect of things.

B. No maxim may be more depended upon
than that, whatever is *true* and *right* will finally
prevail, and the more violent is the oppoſition

that is made to them, the more firmly will they be eſtabliſhed in the end; becauſe oppoſition excites *attention*, and this is all that is neceſſary to the perception of any truth in minds free from prejudice; and in time one prejudice will ſo balance another, that true candour will prevail in the world.

A. I think I can perceive your opinion of the great excellence of the Engliſh conſtitution is ſomewhat changed ſince our laſt converſation, when you dropped no hint of there being any thing amiſs in its general principles.

B. I am not aſhamed to acknowledge that this has been the caſe. There is no good reaſon why any man ſhould be blind to the defects of his parent ſtate, any more than to thoſe of his natural parents. Nothing human, we all allow, is abſolutely perfect; but what is imperfect may be borne with; which I think to be the caſe with the conſtitution of England. I have not, I own, that high veneration which I once had for it: ſince I have ſeen others which appear to me to be better. But I think that all the ſolid advantages of ſociety may be had in ours, with ſuch *reforms* as it is very capable of. And it will certainly be wiſdom in our governors to liſten to propoſals of reform, rather than run the riſk of ſuch convulſions as may be the conſequence of an obſtinate refuſal to reform any thing.

Still, however, I have no objection to a form of government in which the ſupreme power may be

be ſaid to be lodged in *three ſtates*, and thoſe ſtate
may with propriety enough be termed *king, lord*
and commons; the king being the perſon who ha
the *executive power* of the ſtate, the lords being
ſelect ſenate, and the commons a true *repreſentativ*
of the people at large. But the power and emolu
ments of the king may be greatly reduced; no
is it neceſſary that either his office, or that o
the lords, ſhould be hereditary, or even for life
and neither the lords nor the king ſhould have a
abſolute negative on the reſolutions of the houſe
of commons.

If it be ſaid that ſuch a government as thi
would be more properly called a *republic*, than
a *monarchy*, I have no objection. The defini-
tions of thoſe terms are in a great meaſure arbi-
trary, and it is not *names* but *things*, that we are
to attend to.

I am far, however, from wiſhing that any
attempts ſhould be made to reduce the govern-
ment of England into ſuch a form as this, which
I might recommend to a country that had no
government at all. Things once eſtabliſhed
ſhould be reſpected by ſpeculative politicians,
becauſe they will be reſpected by the people at
large; but every thing ſhould be put into the
way of as much reformation as it is capable of.

If the houſe of commons could be made,
what it once really was, but is now very far from
being, a real *repreſentative of the people*, every
other reform would be made without any diffi-
culty whatever; becauſe they would be ſuch as

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the great body of the people would really wiſh for, and therefore ſuch as would have their moſt hearty concurrence. And then what power could reſiſt their force?

There is no danger of a whole people making too many, or too rapid changes. The greater part are always ſufficiently averſe to *innovations*, and it is happy that they are ſo; becauſe in conſequence of this every public meaſure is ſure to meet with the moſt ample diſcuſſion, and to be thoroughly well conſidered; and not only the more intelligent, but alſo the leaſt ſo, muſt be convinced before any thing that is new can be fully eſtabliſhed. Changes made with ſuch deliberation, and after ſo much diſcuſſion, are pretty ſure to be permanent. For, in the time that is neceſſary to bring them about, every poſſible objection will have been urged, and every inconvenience that can be foreſeen will be obviated.

When reforms are made with this deliberate circumſpection, no individuals need to ſuffer from them. If it be poſſible, let all retrenchments of profit or honour affect *poſterity* only, who will never have enjoyed them; and let the emoluments of abuſe die away gradually with thoſe who are at preſent poſſeſſed of them. A reformation on this plan cannot be ſaid to be violent, or to have any thing in it that can juſtly alarm any man.

A. I think myſelf much obliged to you for this free communication of your ſentiments on theſe

theſe important ſubjects, and ſhall take the liberty to apply to you again on any ſimilar occaſion.

B. I ſhall think myſelf happy if, by means of ſuch free converſation, any new light ſhould be ſtruck out by either of us. Theſe ſubjects have much difficulty attending them; and much reflection, as well as an extenſive acquaintance with hiſtory and exiſting facts are neceſſary to get a proper inſight into them. I am myſelf but a learner; but whatever light I get myſelf, I ſhall be happy to communicate it others.

N. B. Theſe Dialogues will perhaps be continued and by different hands.